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Poll: Voters drowning in costs now see what were once ‘women’s issues’ as key solutions to affordability crisis

Equal Rights Advocates Action Fund’s inaugural poll of 1,000 likely 2026 voters finds majorities say the economy isn’t working for them and most have taken at least one painful financial action to cover the higher cost of living. They overwhelmingly support issues once considered “women’s issues” – paid leave, access to affordable child and elder care, equal pay – as essential solutions to the affordability crisis.

SAN FRANCISCO, Sept. 9, 2026 – Nearly six in 10 voters say the economy is not working for them and 82% have taken at least one painful financial step this year to keep up with rising costs. More than seven in 10 of those same voters say federal and state leaders need to make progress on policies long considered “women’s issues” – such as paid leave, access to affordable child and elder care, and equal pay – to solve the affordability crisis, according to [Equal Rights Advocates Action Fund’s](#) (ERA-AF) [Economic Security Poll](#), released today.

The inaugural ERA-AF poll of 1,000 likely 2026 voters, conducted in July and August by Lake Research Partners, found voters are more likely to vote for an elected official in their state who supports policies including ensuring affordable healthcare for all, up to 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave, paid sick days for all working people, strengthening equal pay laws for women, and free child care and early childhood education, by a roughly 3-to-1 margin or better. Independent voters, who decide elections, also are more likely by margins of at least 7-to-1 to vote for an elected official in their state who supports these policies.

“These policies got filed under ‘women’s issues’ for decades for a reason. Women are the ones paid less for the same work and are the ones taking care of the kids and aging parents,” said Noreen Farrell, President and Executive Director of ERA-AF. “But the reality is these are not and have never been just ‘women’s issues.’ They were ignored, and because of it, they’re now

everyone's problems. Voters across the board are saying enacting these policies will bring down some of the highest costs all Americans are now facing."

The economic pain is deep, and voters and their families are struggling

Fifty-eight percent of voters say the economy is not working well for them and their family right now. To cover rising costs, voters report they have taken a number of painful actions, including:

- Cutting back on nonessential purchases: 57%
- Taking money out of savings: 37%
- Cutting back on essential purchases: 34%
- Carrying a credit card balance to cover rising costs: 27%
- Stopped saving for the future: 25%
- Working extra shifts or taking a second or third job: 19%

Only 17% of voters said they have taken none of these steps. The strain crosses party lines with 71% of Republicans, 87% of independents, and 90% of Democrats reporting having taken at least one of these actions this year.

Voters back the Economic Security Policy Agenda

Asked how important it is for Congress to act on each item in ERA-AF's Economic Security Policy Agenda in the next two years, voters said every policy was important, at 73% or higher, including:

- Protecting Social Security: 95%
- Lowering the cost of basics like food, housing, and utilities: 94%
- Lowering healthcare and prescription drug costs: 94%
- Access to affordable family and elder care: 89%
- Increasing wages and salaries: 86%
- Having paid leave from work: 78%
- Requiring equal pay for women in the workplace: 78%
- Access to quality, affordable childcare: 73%

Independent voters back nearly every item in the agenda at rates higher than the national average, including 92% on affordable family and elder care and 87% on having access to quality, affordable childcare.

"We are constantly polling a variety of policies and rarely see results like this. What is unusual here is the intensity of support for each policy tested," said Celinda Lake, President of Lake Research Partners. "The lowest number in the entire battery was 73%, and most sat in the 80 to 90 percentile. Mom and apple pie don't even poll this high. Numbers like these don't tell you voters find these policies agreeable, they tell you voters want them badly."

Voters will reward officials who act

Across all policies tested, at least 63% of voters said they would be more likely to vote for an elected official who supported them and no more than 22% said less likely – margins of roughly 3-to-1 or better.

- Offer up to 12 weeks of paid family and medical leave for all working people: 74% more likely, 14% less likely
- Ensure affordable healthcare for all: 74% more likely, 16% less likely
- Offer up to 7 paid sick days for all working people: 73% more likely, 11% less likely
- Strengthen equal pay laws for women: 71% more likely, 9% less likely
- Offer free child care and early childhood education: 63% more likely, 20% less likely

“The road to victory for candidates this November runs straight through this agenda. This poll shows that these issues energize Democrats, win over independents, and even resonate with a notable number of Republicans,” Farrell said. “Candidates who turn their backs on these issues and the intense economic pain voters are experiencing right now will pay for it at the ballot box.”

Lake Research Partners designed and administered the survey of 1,000 likely 2026 voters nationwide on behalf of ERA-AF. Interviews were conducted in July and August 2026, split between live telephone and self-administered online response. The poll’s margin of error is 2.9%.

Download the [full report here](#).

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About Equal Rights Advocates Action Fund (ERA-AF)

Equal Rights Advocates Action Fund (ERA-AF) is the 501(c)(4) arm of Equal Rights Advocates, which has fought for gender justice across America for more than 50 years. ERA-AF polls voters, shapes public debate and recruits gender equity champions in statehouses and Congress. www.ERA-AF.org